

**STRANGER
THINGS**



What If?

Stranger Shorts - The Omnibus by inktopia

Category: Stranger Things, 2016

Genre: Sci-Fi, Supernatural

Language: English

Characters: Eleven/Jane H., J. Hopper, Mike W., OC

Status: In-Progress

Published: 2018-10-27 06:42:32

Updated: 2019-08-04 08:01:00

Packaged: 2019-12-12 16:56:41

Rating: T

Chapters: 2

Words: 10,614

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: Some stories yearn to become an epic saga, while the others; the craziest of ideas are free to choose their paths. This is the place to find them; all the What-Ifs, the If-then-so-whats, the heartbreaks, the fluff pieces, the impossibilities, and the hopes & dreams, the horror and the fiction, all will come to rest here, unbounded by reality - Update: Chapter 2 - The First Promise

1. A Mileven Halloween

ST One-Shot #1

What if El came back to Mike on the night of Halloween?

It was the night of Halloween in the spooky town of Hawkins, Indiana. Somewhere in a cabin hidden in the woods, a girl named Eleven was sprawling on a couch and munching on an Eggo while watching the TV. It was her favorite pastime, but tonight there was a problem; the waffle tasted like cardboard, and the flick made absolutely no sense. She couldn't figure out what was missing, so with mundane curiosity, she kept switching the channels. She turned the dial twice but froze as the screen caught her attention.

Behind the transparent display of the motionless box, a young boy and a girl were walking side by side through the street in a quest to find something. They were dressed like monsters from some obscure comic book and carried baskets in their hands. Eleven recalled what Mike had told her about Halloween a few days back.

On that fateful evening, Eleven wrapped a blindfold around her eyes and transported her soul to Mike's basement. Then she gently sat down in front of the excited boy who was about to tell her about his adventures. Like every day, Mike started the conversation with plenty of excitement, "El? There's this festival that's taking place the day after tomorrow..."

Eleven was listening with rapt attention, but at the same time, she was intently staring at Mike's face. It was one of her favorite hobbies; to observe Mike to her heart's content. She couldn't speak to him, but she could memorize every small detail about his persona, and that enabled her to notice the sudden shift in Mike's tone that night.

Mike sighed and spoke, "I wanted to take you to trick or treating with me. You never had so much fun in your..."

Over the past few months, he had made many appeals to Eleven which had gone unanswered. Though it shattered her heart every time Mike had pleaded her to render a sign or come to school with

him, she was not able to fulfill their desires. The agents were still investigating them. But that night, she nearly lost control as Mike made his heartfelt request to the void, "...can you come meet me on Halloween night? I'll dress up as a ghostbuster. Maybe... you can come... I won't tell anybody, just you and me."

Eleven couldn't respond, she kept sobbing as Mike uttered his closing words, "I'll wait for you. Forever. El!"

The very next day, Eleven stopped Hopper as he was leaving and spoke urgently, "Can you bring a comic book?"

"When did you become interested in comics?"

Eleven had framed her answers carefully. She spoke coolly, "TV!"

She kept her answer short and simple because she didn't like lying to her friends. But this was an emergency, and after all, she was telling the truth in a particular fashion. She figured it was alright.

"I'll get you something."

"Ghost... Busters...!"

Hopper wasn't surprised because he had seen the trailer of the movie a few days back with his daughter. It was undoubtedly an entertaining flick, but how did she know that there was a comic?

Hopper nodded slowly, "I'll see what I can do."

Eleven shook her head and replied, "Ghost... busters...!"

Hopper groaned and walked towards his van.

That night, Hopper handed her a roll of paper and sighed, "I'm sorry. I couldn't get a comic. I got a post..."

He couldn't finish his apology. Eleven beamed like the sun and hugged him tightly. In return, Hopper smiled and ran his hand through her fluffy hair. It often amazed him that how little it took to satisfy his daughter, except for that damn Wheeler kid. Eleven would not accept even the moon in his place. Then she let go and ran into

her room with the poster and didn't come out until dinner time.

Being completely detached from the outside world, Eleven had to struggle to decide how to visit Mike on Halloween. But she finally made her mind up before going to bed. From the trailer and the poster, she had realized that the Ghostbusters were a group of people who captured evil ghosts. Mike was going to the Halloween costumed as a ghostbuster. The other three members of the party would definitely be donning similar outfits. But the Ghostbusters gang had only four members. So, what would Eleven dress like? She got the answer a minute later as her eyes fell on the corner of the poster.

'Slimer! I would go as ghost. Mike will know who I am.' She grinned as the thought nested in her mind before she went to bed. However, the next day, Hopper dumped a lake full of water on that raging fire and gave strict instructions to Eleven to not leave the cabin. He was paranoid about safety and Halloween was full of unnecessary distractions that they could not afford.

So, here Eleven was, watching TV with complete disinterest and wanting to visit Mike like anything. But then that strange movie started playing that drew her interest like a magnet. There was something special about the young couple who were walking by themselves, hand in hand through the quietest suburbs of the town. Suddenly, the street lights started flickering. In an instant, Eleven leaned forward and focused on the screen with complete attention.

The duo crossed the street and entered the pathway leading to a battered house that screamed danger at sight. There were sure to be monsters hiding in that home. Eleven urged the couple to run away, but her voice couldn't penetrate the glass that separated the two realities. Oh, Eleven wasn't afraid of horror films, she had lived in one for thirteen damned years. But some possibilities shook her to the core when she thought about them. As if the TV understood her darkest fear, the door of that broken house opened slowly, and suddenly, a large hairy arm shot out of the darkness and grabbed the boy. The girl started screaming, and the final cries of the boy faded into the background noise as the house swallowed him whole. Eleven couldn't take it anymore. She switched the TV off with a mental drive and crashed onto the ground in front of the couch. In the heat of the

moment, she had forgotten that she had been standing on the sofa for the last few minutes. The fall didn't hurt that much, but she felt the pain inside her heart. She needed to know the fate of the couple. A moment later, still reeling from the shock, she switched the TV on and witnessed a tragic scene. The girl was sitting in front of the house and crying all by herself. Her friend had been devoured by the monstrosity that refused to take her, and now she couldn't do anything. The credits started rolling as Eleven jumped up from the floor and raced into her room.

An hour later, in the town of Hawkins, the bell of the Klein residence rang a few times.

"We have our first guests," Mrs. Klein spoke excitedly and almost ran to the door. Mr. Klein followed his wife with a heavy basket in his hand. He didn't mind, he loved his wife and also loved children. She opened the door and greeted the four kids standing at the porch.

A few minutes later, four dejected souls left the driveway with heavy hearts.

Dustin sniffed, "He's the Mayor, can't he at least buy some decent candies?"

"Oh come on. She makes amazing candies," Lucas objected meekly. He loved Mrs. Klein's candies, but he also expected some additional goodies.

"A nougat is all I ask for, is it..."

The other two kids didn't bother taking part in the debate. Mike was feeling depressed because Eleven didn't come. Of course, his brain had already warned his heart about the consequences of its foolish fantasies. But the spirit was unstoppable at times. Beside him, Will was walking in a slow gait too. He was being hounded by a strange monstrous cloud that no one could see, and he was feeling pretty fucked up about that subject. He knew that no one would believe him, but...

A voice resounded in his mind, "I've seen many impossibilities

turning into possibilities during that week. I believe..."

Mike believed in the impossibility. He was the one to have shielded Eleven against her unstoppable fate until the last moment. And even now, after nearly a year, he still believed that she would come back to him one day. Perhaps Mike would understand him?

Before Will could open his mouth, Mike suddenly stopped and grabbed his hand tightly. Will turned his gaze towards Mike's face and then shifted it towards where his eyes pointed. A small figure was standing on the road draped in a white cloth. It was the most hilarious costume that Will had ever seen in his entire life. The kid was dressed as a... *'Bedsheet ghost?'*

Mike was staring at the figure with absolute attention as if he was actually looking at a ghost. The figure was standing there too, completely transfixed as if it was staring at a real ghostbuster. A few moments later, a hand dropped in Mike's shoulder, and he was yanked out of his trance.

"What the hell are you two doing?" Dustin seemed frustrated.

"Yeah man, let's go. All the good stuff's gonna run out," Lucas supported him.

Mike stuttered for a second, "You... do you... that figure!"

"You okay Mike?" Will was tensed about this sudden shift in Mike's behavior.

"What? Oh, that kid?" Dustin spoke indifferently.

Mike shook his head to clear his mind and spoke with alarm, "She looks familiar."

Lucas came forward and spoke earnestly, "Listen, Mike. You're losing it again. First of all, that's a boy. Girls don't dress like that. And second, IT'S NOT HER."

"But..."

Dustin voiced support to Lucas, "Come on Mike. He's correct. What

are the chances that she won't run to you if she really comes back? Look at the kid. He's not even moving."

Mike shrugged, he didn't have an answer to the strange feelings that had sent a barrage of sparks into a cold furnace inside his heart. But he had to know. To the bewilderment of his friends, he took a hesitant step forward. The kid kept standing there like a statue. Was he shaking? Was that a real ghost?

The gang reached the figure after a few seconds, but the apparition didn't speak to them. Will traced the faint outline underneath the sheet and realized that the head was moving as if it was trying to ensure who they really were. Then it returned to Mike's face and froze.

Mike gently lifted an arm to remove the sheet, but Lucas stopped him, "Are you crazy? What if the kid's mom is here?"

Mike suddenly became aware of the stupidity of his action. He lowered his hand as a mild gust sent a ripple down the sheet.

"Umm... what... you..."

"For crying out loud!" Dustin lost his shit and almost yelled, "Listen, kid. What do you want?"

There was no reply. The eyes hidden by the shadow were focused entirely on Mike.

"Ah damn. A crazy one. Alright, let's go," Dustin literally dragged Mike away from the kid.

They moved a few meters ahead when Mike halted and freed himself from Dustin's clutches.

"What? Seriously?"

Mike turned around and ran back to the kid who was still standing at the exact same location.

He reached the kid and spoke gently, "You remind me of a friend."

The wind suddenly picked up and sent ripples through the sheet, but the frame didn't move.

"I brought something for her. But I guess she's not coming," Mike tried to laugh, but the lump in his throat obstructed him.

He sighed as he removed the shoulder straps of his ghostbuster backpack, lowered it to the ground and took out two objects. The first was a package containing two Eggos and the second, a chocolate bar in waffle flavor. Then he held them to the kid and smiled, "You can have them. I'll just believe that you're her."

Mike was struggling to hold the smile. The corners of his mouth kept trying to bend towards the bottom as he fought to hold back his tears, but the kid standing in front of him didn't need to witness his sorrow. So he held onto his resolve and continued, "It's not much. But she loved Eggos. So..."

Suddenly, the sheet moved. It slowly rose about a foot, and a small palm appeared beneath the drape. The light was sparse at this part of the street and Mike couldn't make out the shape clearly. On top of that, his vision was becoming blurred as tears fought to break through their prison. He gently placed the confectionary on the outstretched palm and smiled at the figure. Will was standing right beside him while the rest of the gang was holding their positions a few feet back. A moment later, they followed his lead as he walked away from the figure without turning back even once. It was a dream after all, but the longer he stayed there, the shorter its duration would be. He needed to leave that place as quickly as possible. The gang marched away, with one dejected and one confused soul at its head.

Just before taking the corner, Lucas noticed the two men who were standing beside a white unmarked van and casually observing their surroundings. He stiffened his shoulders as he faintly recalled a scene from one year back. But he let it go a moment later as he remembered that its been almost a year since that tragic night and the feds had never come after them since then. What he didn't notice was that a few minutes after they were gone from the location, the brakes of the vehicle failed, and it started rolling downhill. The two men ran after their van, cursing along the way as the van rammed

through the barrier along the road and disappeared from the field of view completely.

Another thirty minutes passed, and the party secured a few big wins and made some strange discoveries along the way. The most bizarre was the appearance of that annoying girl named Max. Mike hated her from the guts because he was sure that she was scheming to take Eleven's place. He would be having none of it, but he was not in a mood to fight with Lucas and Dustin at that point either. There were two distinct groups in the party now. Dustin, Lucas, and Max formed the merry band while Mike and Will formed the grouchy gang. A few minutes later the two groups split, and Mike and Will sat down on a bench at the side of the street. Will was fumbling with his makeshift blaster and trying to make sense of something but wasn't confident enough to speak to Mike.

Mike noticed the agitation and smiled at his friend, "You want to tell me something?"

"It's nothing. But..."

"Will. You can tell me anything, I'm your friend," Mike encouraged him.

Will thought for a second and made up his mind. Then he spoke calmly, "Mike. What I'm about to tell you may be a simple coincidence. It can also be a mistake."

Mike felt confused at the words but nodded.

"The kid we just met had something written on his left arm."

Somewhere far away, somewhere beyond the reaches of mortal man, a spark was born inside a cold forge.

Mike couldn't speak. He swallowed and urged Will continue. Will stared at his eyes and spoke with resolve, "It said zero... one... one... Mike?"

Mike was already running towards the location they had visited thirty minutes back. He shouted, "Not zero... one... one..."

Mike had told Will about Eleven but never described the true nature of her tattoo. Unlike other numbers, it had a zero transcribed before the two ones.

Will stood up and started running behind his friend as Mike laughed to the wind, "ELEVEN!"

They kept running through the street as fast as their little feet could carry them. After approximately five minutes of running, they reached the location but couldn't find anyone. It was empty, and the ghost was gone just like it was supposed to.

Mike shouted in the wind, "ELEVEN? EL?"

Will helped by checking the other direction. There weren't any replies. Mike kept repeating his question but the moment was gone. They couldn't find her.

Thirty minutes later they sat down on the curb as their stamina nearly ran out. Will cleared his throat and spoke, "I'm sorry Mike. I should've told you earlier."

Mike sighed but smiled at his soft-spoken friend.

"It's okay. At least she's alive. Now I know that she's out there..."

Will gently clutched Mike's hand and shouted enthusiastically, "WE WILL FIND HER."

"You lost your mommy?" a shrill voice rang behind them.

Mike and Will swallowed and slowly turned their heads around. A group of older boys was standing behind them and laughing like lunatics. The leader of the gang carried a brass knuckle on his right hand. Both Mike and Will knew that boy; Jeff was Troy's older brother and an impeccable rascal.

"Run!" Mike threw the word into the air and dashed towards the right as Will ran towards the left. After a few seconds of running, Mike turned his head to get a look behind. He was relieved to see that the entire gang was running after him. It meant that Will was saved. But it also indicated that Mike was utterly fucked. The last time he'd got

hit by the brass knuckle it had hurt like hell, and he wasn't in a rush to refresh his memory.

Mike was a swift sprinter, but they were senior students. He could never beat them in the long run. But he believed in impossibility, so he kept racing. He dashed for another few minutes and felt like crashing onto the pavement but somehow kept moving. His throat was raw, and his mouth was parched. He wished for this to get over as fast as possible but his body protested; better damage the leg and injure the lungs to protect the rest. Mike took a corner and suddenly got whacked by a blow to the face. Then the lights went out inside his head and sealed his fate.

Sometime later Mike came to his senses, and his mind confirmed that he was out only for some time, but it felt like an eternity. A terrible headache was tearing away at his skull, and he had difficulty focusing his eyes. Then after another few moments, he found himself tied to a broken chair in a run-down shack somewhere in Hawkins. Or he hoped it was.

He discovered the entire gang sitting around him, comfortably going through some slut mags and drinking beer. Jeff noticed him and called out, "Ho ho ho. The prince is up, rise and shine."

Mike was studying the brass knuckles with rapt concentration. It glimmered under the faint light that radiated from the lamp hanging on the ceiling. Jeff slowly put his fingers through the holes and formed a fist, the polished alloy creating a menacing weapon that guaranteed pain.

Mike felt a knot in his stomach. Was Hawkins full of psychopaths? Would one day Indiana lead the country in the number of serial killings? First, there was Troy, a high school kid who carried a knife with him and had nearly killed him last year. Now his brother, Jeff was about to beat the shit out of a fourteen-year-old kid with brass knuckles that hurt worse than anything he had faced in his life.

Jeff came to him in a slow and steady pace and stood beside the chair. There were no long talks, no heroic speeches, no begging, and no crying. This was real life, and everything moved fast. Jeff cleared his throat and spoke calmly, "End of the line kid. It's time to pay the

price."

But then he made a strange face as he tapped Mike's forehead with the knuckles. Then he spoke in a sincere voice, "It doesn't have to be so bad. You can still walk away."

Mike felt puzzled but nodded. Whatever this psycho was thinking couldn't be worse than what Mike was expecting a moment ago. Jeff crouched in front of him and asked calmly, "Where is that girl who broke my brother's arm?"

Mike felt a fuse going off inside his head. He gritted his teeth and spoke with conviction, "I'll never tell you."

"Oh, so you do know. You lied to me last time, boy," Jeff sounded angry.

He rapped the knuckle on Mike's head with a bit more force this time. It was a light blow that knocked the breath straight out of him. He almost screamed in pain but somehow held onto his voice. These punks were no match for Eleven but what if she didn't have her powers anymore? Comic books always talked about heroes who had burnt through their abilities during their final acts of valor. And Mike had the proof right in the front of his eyes. Eleven was alive but never tried contacting him through the radio. So, either she had utterly forgotten Mike or she had lost her powers. A goddess without her endowments would not be able to fight the monster standing in front of him. So, Mike struggled against his instincts to swallow the pain that was trying its best to make him scream for help.

Jeff sighed and spoke, "You're making this difficult kid. I just want to talk to her."

"I WILL NOT TELL YO..."

Jeff viciously backhanded Mike before he could finish the sentence. Mike gave a muffled cry as tears started flowing down his cheek. All that talk about resolve was real, but he was a kid after all. He tasted blood on his split lips, but he would still not tell them about Eleven. Jeff pulled back his arm and leveled it at Mike's abdomen, then he drove it forward in a practiced motion. Mike closed his eyes and

waited for the pain to reach him and make him pass out.

But it never came. A second passed, then another, then another, still nothing. Mike opened his eyes and observed Jeff standing in front of him with his jaw hanging wide open. His eyeballs were trying their best to close the shutter. Jeff closed and opened his eyes a few times as if trying to guess whether he was awake or dreaming. Mike looked down and almost lost his shit.

Jeff's arm was hovering inches away from Mike's abdomen like a statue made of stone. It was unnaturally immobile for a human hand, and by the look of things, Jeff had nothing to do with this magic. With a shocking realization, Mike realized that something had just gone terribly wrong as the metallic door of the shack was suddenly yanked out by a tremendous force from the outside. Then it disappeared into the night leaving in its place a hollow door frame through which fog started spilling into the room.

A second later, a small figure wearing a white drape slowly walked inside, leaving in its wake swirling fog that gave away to the wind. The figure moved inside the room and turned its face towards Mike. Through the small openings in the drape, Mike finally saw the eyes as they reflected the light coming from the halogen on the ceiling. They burnt with a fury to which even Jeff's murderous intent couldn't hold a candle. This wasn't the situation in which Mike wanted to meet Eleven but she was here at last, and he was delighted. But a moment later he imagined the scene from Eleven's perspective.

First of all, Mike was tied to a chair, apparently intended for torture. Second, Mike was bleeding from his lips, the result of the act undoubtedly committed by the tall boy standing in front of him.

'Eleven has just walked into a stage where her friend is being tortured. SHIT!'

Jeff finally freed his hand from the invisible hold, turned around and shouted at the strange apparition, "The fuck? Who the fuck are you?"

"DON'T KILL HIM!" Mike shouted.

The occupants in the room turned their face towards Mike in shock.

Before they could react, the figure raised its arm, and all hell broke loose.

With a series of cracks, every finger in Jeff's right hand snapped like toothpicks. It was the same hand that held the brass knuckle, and now he would never be able to take it off without surgical intervention. Before he could howl in pain, a metal bucket flew from the corner of the room, hit him straight on the face and knocked him out cold. The two members of Jeff's gang made a dash towards the exit but couldn't reach it. With a shriek, they flew up and crashed through the ceiling and drifted outside. One of the guys desperately grabbed the lamp on his way out, and the room was plunged into darkness.

Mike held his breath for the chaos to get over and kept praying that Eleven did not kill anyone. The lamp was gone, but slivers of moonlight sliced through the swirling fog entering the room from the twin holes on the roof. Mike squinted his eyes but could not find the white figure in the sparse moonlight. Eleven had disappeared just like the ghost she was dressed as.

Mike thought about a lost traveler who had just discovered an ocean at the edge of a desert. It wasn't a mirage, it was genuine. But the water was salty and not suitable for drinking. He still needed to find the oasis. First though, Mike slowly counted the brighter side of things. Eleven was alive and doing well. She had undoubtedly gotten stronger and still cared for him. He breathed a sigh of relief and wiped his tears with his arms. Then he froze midway as realization dawned on him. His arms were tied behind him a few moments ago, but now they were free. Mike swallowed and stood up from the chair. Then he gritted his teeth and turned around.

His heart stopped as he found the ghost standing right behind his chair. A smooth wind blew ripples on the white drape as Mike walked towards the apparition, shaking all the way. He reached and stood next to the figure and spoke in a shaking voice, "El?"

Then he held his breath and awaited a reply. A moment later, the figure raised its arm and pressed its soft fingers against Mike's lips.

Somewhere in the realm of emotions, a forge roared to life as the lone

spark ignited the fuel that had been imprisoned for so long.

Mike inhaled sharply and then started laughing in relief, it was Eleven after all. A lifetime ago, while walking beside him on the rail tracks, she had made the exact same gesture after seeing the wound on his chin. No matter where they were, or what time it was, Eleven could never withstand any harm to Mike.

The apparition responded in a sweet voice, "Mike?"

Mike realized that it was a question, and he provided the answer by wrapping his arms tightly around the figure. No, Mike had not forgotten her, he still loved her as much as he did back then. In reply, Eleven wrapped her hands around Mike and started crying in relief. It was a dream both of them had waited for so long to come true, and at last, it had become a reality. They need not speak any words, their bond was beyond the simple construct of human language.

A few minutes later they parted, and Mike slowly lifted the veil and stared in amazement at the girl who had stolen his heart a lifetime ago. Eleven looked absolutely gorgeous in the soft moonlight. Mike had imagined night after night about how she would look like when she came back to him. But Eleven had exceeded all expectations. In place of the buzzcut, she had a headful of poofy hair that unevenly covered part of her forehead. Beneath it was a smiling face flanked on both sides by a pair of pointy ears. Eleven had changed in the last year; she appeared more mature, calmer and more determined now. But her eyes were still the same; a pair of dark pools filled with compassion, hope, and love. Another thing didn't change; her weird nosebleed. It was El after all. She grinned at him when their eyes met, but Mike couldn't respond. To put it simply, Eleven had taken his breath away and had left him at a complete loss for words. So, he did the only thing he could do under the circumstances.

Mike leaned forward and gently kissed his pretty ghost.

A/N: Dear readers. This is an experiment to write small segments of random scenarios in the Stranger Things universe. Most of these will be abstract and bizarre and range from fluff to tragedy, from adventure to family drama. There are no limits. If you have any such random idea in

mind then please post a comment. When I write your What If, I'll give you credit for the concept.

2. The First Promise

One-Shot#2

What if Mike never had to wait for Eleven?

The rectangular white lamps lining the ceiling kept flickering as Mike was hurled backward by an invisible force, entirely against the laws of nature and he hit the wall with a thump and laid there, unable to move a single muscle. To be honest, the crash did not actually hurt that much, but the scene unfolding right in front of his eyes drove a jackhammer inside his guts and ripped it to shreds.

Mike Wheeler had never fallen in love, at least not in the usual sense of the word and definitely not with a girl before. Oh, he cherished a lot of things; his D&D games, his disconnected yet charming family, his collection of weird and exquisite toys - especially the millennium falcon from Star Wars, his new bike that his parents got him on his birthday, and he really appreciated his friends who had been at his side for years. But to his utter surprise, at that very moment, he was willing to leave everything behind to chase after an absurd thought; *El*, more precisely, the girl who had just tossed him away with her telekinetic powers, but he wasn't angry or terrified at all. He wasn't sure what had changed, but he did recall his dad saying that love was like a hurricane that caught you from the right when you were looking at your left, but in this case, it crashed onto him from eleven different directions and knocked out his senses. Every redundant thought left his mind, and every ounce of extra strength left his body. Now, only one pair remained; *a dream of taking El to the Snowball, and a flickering pulse of force to do the unthinkable.*

"I won't let you leave, you promised," Mike murmured and used the last ounce of stamina left in his body to stand up. It was a wonder he didn't collapse from the strain, after all, his little body had been through hell and back that night, but there was no time to give into weaknesses. Right about now, the girl who he adored from the bottom of his heart was about to go away forever. He wasn't sure how he knew that she was never going to come back, maybe it was from spending too much time with her during the last week, perhaps he could feel her intentions just by looking into her eyes, or probably

because she had just turned around and bid goodbye to him. Mike stopped for a second and ran the word a few times inside his head, then he ignored the puddles of tears filling up his eyes and took a step forward.

The lights started flickering rapidly as Eleven raised her arm towards the Demogorgon that was pinned to the blackboard on the wall. The beast roared, and the noise from the flickering lamps mixed with the cacophony unleashed hell inside the classroom. Dustin covered his ears with his palms and squealed in terror while Lucas somehow managed to overcome the dreaded feeling inside his stomach and lurched forward to grab his foolish friend who was about to intervene a battle being fought by demons. Mike jerked his hand away with a shout, "Go away, Lucas. I won't let her..."

His speech was cut short when El started yelling as she pushed the Demogorgon back into the wall with unimaginable force - this was the power of the real monster that had walked into their lives. Any sane person would have taken one fleeting look at the battlefield and run away like a rabbit being chased by hounds but not Mike Wheeler. He had always been a fool, but this time, he was a fool with a cause. He blinked a few times to clear his eyes, and during every flicker, he saw her gorgeous face; sometimes beaming with joy, other times gasping in wonder and the last time, crying in agony as she was about to leave the one boy who had given her a home and a name.

"EL?" Mike shouted in a broken voice and began running. His friends' cries were drowned out by the discord in the classroom, but Mike could clearly see a strange cloud of dark particles coming out from the Demogorgon, which was now wailing like a dying beast. The haze began engulfing Eleven slowly as her form faded and reappeared under the flickering light. Mike was almost there, and his eardrums were on the verge of bursting from the noise, but he didn't quit. *One pair of organs were nothing compared to the heart that kept him alive.* Smiling at the thought, he reached El and jumped towards her with his arms stretched forward. The heavens roared, and Mike felt a cold wave engulfing him and numbing his conscience, but his arms were firmly wrapped around a soft and nimble form, as it should have been. *Nothing mattered anymore.*

A lifetime later, Mike felt a horrible pain tearing the muscles all throughout his body. He opened his mouth to cry out in pain but couldn't even feel his throat, it had gone completely numb. So he decided to lay on the hard floor and figure out where he was and a few seconds later, jerked his eyes opened as he recalled everything. It took a few seconds for the blurred texture to form into a wall; specifically, it was the ceiling in the classroom. However, it didn't look like anything he had ever seen in his life. The room was alight with a strange bluish glow that came from some unknown light source, and in that dim radiance, he found himself stranded in the Upside Down.

After struggling for a few seconds with his strained limbs, Mike was able to sit up and observe his surroundings. He was still inside the classroom inside his school, but it looked nothing like what he had ever seen in his life, even though he had tried imagining it. When Mike and his gang were theorizing about the strange place from their favorite board game, they had discussed in detail what it might have looked like. Dustin thought it would be an endless swamplike landscape filled with unimaginable monsters from every horror story they had heard in their lives. Lucas was more inclined towards an empty space with no lights, or stars, or anything but he did agree to the part about the monsters. Now that Mike was here, and he hoped he wasn't dead and gone to hell, the Upside Down actually looked like their own world - a mirror version of Earth, just as Mike thought it would be, well if the Earth was taken over by Cthulhu. Mike shivered at that thought and climbed up on his feet, then almost fell down when he couldn't find Eleven around him.

"What the hell?" Mike cursed as he ran his eyes around the room full of broken furniture and vine-covered walls. He clearly remembered grabbing her when he was pulled in, but she was nowhere to be found, and that thought sapped the remaining strength from his body.

'She's got to be here somewhere,' Mike thought and heard a reply from his mind, *'Unless she was taken by the Demogorgon.'* The thought froze his blood, and he desperately tried thinking about all the happy times he had spent with her. Maybe she had somehow managed to stay back in the real world, and that meant he was going to die alone inside this hellhole. But even at his darkest hour, Mike was at peace

with the thought of perishing by himself, because for better or worse, he had managed to save Eleven from her fate. And to a hero of the former AV Club, it was a noble ending to a rather monotonous life.

There was nothing of significance inside the otherwise mirror image of the room from Hawkins Middle School. The desks were the same, though broken and tarnished by a strange corruption that had also devoured the walls. It was almost alive, responding when Mike stepped on them by screeching and coiling away. He decided to stay away from them. There was enough glow to recognize the surroundings, and his memories of his school helped him to navigate as he quietly walked out of the classroom and entered the hallway. Some strange particles were floating in the air, and they burnt his throat when he breathed them in and made him gag. He took out his soiled handkerchief and tied it around his face to form a makeshift mask, and once his coughing cleared, he was finally able to correctly see what the mirror image of their world really looked like. The corridor was glowing with a strange aura that allowed him to recognize the walls and the charred vines running along its length. Millions of white flakes were floating in the almost still air, and a slight draft carried them towards the front, towards a glowing hole in the wall.

"THE GATE," Mike shouted in joy and started running towards the exit. The thought of getting out of this hellhole and seeing his friends again, to breathe the fresh air of the outside world, and to finally spent a night with Eleven wiped out his fatigue, and with renewed vigor, he kept sprinting towards the opening that was slowly shrinking in size. He was sure that he would be able to make it out. After all, the gap was just a few meters away, and he was a small kid. He could fit through the collapsing circle of light even if it was reduced to half its current diameter. After sprinting for a minute, Mike reached the gateway and took a deep breath to calm his racing heart. Some kind of weird rubbery membrane was covering the exit. He pushed his hands through, and it started stretching. *'Come on, just a little bit more,'* Mike gritted his teeth and pushed and finally his right hand pierced the white membrane and went outside.

"Whooo!" Mike shouted and inserted his other hand through the hole, now all that was left was for him to push out his head and then his body, and he would be home free. Grinning in joy, he leaned

forward, but then he froze. A fraction of a moment earlier, his ears had picked up a faint voice from somewhere calling his name. It had taken another fraction to process it, but then his brain got stuck in a loop for a second to make sense out of it. The muffled howl felt like the voice of someone who he knew from the bottom of his young heart, someone, who against all the odds, was stuck inside the Upside Down because the voice came from behind him. Mike cursed and looked out through the small opening made by his hands through the gooey curtain, the bright lights of the corridor in his school welcomed him to the outside world. The air smelled fresh and felt warm to the touch. He stared at the outside world longingly, images of his friends and family flashing by his eyes one at a time like a kaleidoscope and bringing back memories that felt all too real, but distant.

Mike recalled his home - the wooden panels on the floor of his bedroom, the toys that his mom kept neatly arranged on the shelf, his sisters' banter and father's oblivious nature. Inside his memory palace, he walked around, seeing his world, and his friends who were playing D&D with him on a rainy day. Of course, like most of the times, he was the dungeon master. Lucas winked at Dustin as he placed a figure on the board, they clearly were up to something. Will was sitting beside them, thinking about some strategy that was sure to get him killed along with the party. Mike suppressed an evil grin as he prepared the surprise of a lifetime for his friends. But then, for some unknown reason, he looked towards his left and then dropped his board along with all his plans for that night.

There was a small makeshift tent there, made using a bedsheet draped over a few bits of spare furniture. Underneath the canopy was a small lamp, glowing weakly and illuminating an empty space that cried out for warmth. Mike knew what it was; a home for a girl who never had one, a shelter for a soul that sought refuge from the horrors of human apathy, a temple for a promise sworn before the goddess of innocence. *It was the home Mike Wheeler had made for Eleven.*

El had been through a lot of strange situations in her life. Once upon a time, like the fairy tales that Papa used to read to her, she was imprisoned inside an unusual place with even more outlandish

people. First of all, there were the men wearing white dresses who would be sitting in front of extraordinary machines for hours, and when they were not looking at the dials and the counters, they would be looking after Eleven. She had no idea what their fascination was with her, but after Kali ran away, they were almost obsessed with everything they made her do; like the time they put her in a tank of water and sent her to the black place with the monster. Another time they almost made her kill a cat, which still made her feel nauseous. But this time, she thought that she was inside the strangest place she had ever been in her life. It was the room where she had destroyed the white monster who came after Mike and his friends, but it all looked so wrong. It was missing something.

A spark went off inside her head as she remembered a soft pair of arms wrapping around her waist just before she was sent to this place, and she could recall every detail about him; Mike, the boy who liked her not like a sister. And he was nowhere to be seen.

"Mike?" El whispered weakly and stood up on her feet, it took an inhuman effort to just stay still. Her head was tearing apart in pain, and her throat was as dry as a piece of parchment. But she had no time to waste. She needed to find Mike now, one reason to save him from this Upside down place, and another reason to know why he pressed his lips against her back in the big hall room. She could never imagine doing it with someone else, it was disgusting, *but when it came to Mike...* El blushed at that nonsense thought and limped outside into the corridor.

The outside looked just like the inside of the room, not that she was expecting it to change, but still, the ghastly blue glow and charred walls made her feel sad inside. Something terrible had happened to this place, and Mike was somewhere inside. With the remaining strength inside her body, she shouted his name as best she could, "Mike? Maaaiike? Maaaaaiiiiiiiike?"

Her voice broke, but she still kept yelling as she walked towards the end of the passageway, arms hanging on her side and stress trying to bring her little body down. But she had to move, not for herself but for Mike. There was a certain ring to that word; *Mike*. Thinking about him always made her happy, unlike any word she had ever heard in her life. She didn't know why but she wanted to ask him a question that she recalled from a fairy tale Papa had read to her long ago. Back in the hall room when Mike was saying those tricky things, she

couldn't remember the word, but she was sure that Mike would know it. And once she got her answer, she would run with him to his house and hide inside that strange room he made for her, and she wouldn't let him out of her sight even for a second. She smiled and walked forward until she reached the end of the corridor.

El slowly peeked out from the corner and looked at the passage that ran away towards... *'THE GATE!'*

There was a bright circle of light pulsing at the far end of the long corridor. El carefully observed the vicinity for any signs of Mike, or any ungodly creature that may be hanging around, but the coast seemed clear. But she couldn't move. The gate was open, but Mike might still be inside, and she couldn't leave this terrible world without him. But then curiosity got the better of her. She slowly started walking towards the gate, all the while telling herself that she would just take a look and then use her powers to hold the gate open. And then she would search for Mike and take him home. Smiling at the thought of seeing him again, El closed her distance from the gate and then stopped once she reached a few meters away from it.

The white sheet covering the gate was torn open and was loosely hanging on the outside. She hoped that it was Mike, the thought of him leaving the place alive comforted her beyond anything she had ever felt before. The only task left was to leave and then run to his home, and then ask him for an ego. She was starving, and her stomach would growl every now and then to remind her of her mortal needs. A few seconds passed while El was thinking about what to do. Then for assurance, she turned around and shouted one last time, "Mike?"

A second later, her call was acknowledged by a growl coming from the back that wrecked her nerves. *'No, I killed it,'* El prayed as she peeked over her shoulder and found a clawed arm entering the gateway and tearing the sheet. And then a white colored monster, quite like the one she obliterated back the classroom, slowly crawled through the collapsing circle and landed right in front of the wall. Then it looked up and roared like thunder as a set of serrated teeth opened and sealed her fate. El slowly backed away, unsure of her ability to kill another one of those abominations again. The gate slowly closed up behind the beast as it prowled forward, sniffing the air and measuring its enemy. It could sense the terrible fear that was

now slowly taking control of El's body, and it confidently crawled ahead on all four legs.

El could've run away, the corridor was empty behind her, but somehow she knew that there would be no escaping her fate tonight. Of course, she was already expecting to die when she faced off against the other beast tonight to save Mike, but somehow after remaining alive through the ordeal, she had hoped in the futility of escaping this place and running back to him. That's all she could think of at this moment; Mike, Mike, and Mike. She remembered his bright eyes and beautiful smile, his voice when he said that she was pretty and again confirmed it today. But over and above everything, she remembered the special moment they had shared tonight, where Mike said a lot of strange things and then touched his lips against hers. She smiled as a drop of tear ran down her eyes, she didn't have the strength left to cry anymore, not that she was afraid. No, she wanted to cry because she would never see him again, and the thought made her sadder than even the monster that was about to end her life. El closed her eyes and waited for the end. A second past, another, and then she could finally smell the strange stench that was coming from the beast. It was close, she tensed her body and waited, unable to even feel her powers anymore.

"Leave my girlfriend alone, you mutated raccoon!"

El opened her eyes and shouted, "Mike?"

Then before her very eyes, the unthinkable happened. Mike came running out of the other corner and stopped a short distance away from the beast. The abomination glanced at Mike but ignored him. El was much closer and was the easier victim, after all, Mike would not be going anywhere soon. But he had apparently guessed that this would happen and came prepared. Without wasting any time, he picked up a small piece of shattered ceramic tile from the floor and then jabbed it into a thick vine on the wall beside him. Immediately, the snake-like reed coiled away with an inhuman screech which was drowned by the painful roar from the monster. Then it turned and raced towards Mike, who was already running away towards the other end of the corridor.

"El, open the gate..." Mike paused as he banked around a door and

entered a classroom and shouted at the top of his lungs, "Get out." And then he ran through the room and came out at a different passageway, one that reached towards the parking lot on the backside. If he could make it to the end of the corridor, he would be able to run outside and take his chances with the Demogorgon in an open field. From whatever he had learned about the monster, its ability to sneak through close quarters didn't excite him about the probability of facing it inside the school building.

"Almost there, almost..." Mike breathed painfully and tried to force down some pungent air through his raw throat and into his tired lungs, and then he breathed it all out, "SHIT."

The door at the end of the passageway was now blocked by the vines that were slowly creeping out from the shadows and flowing around the worn out latches. When attacked, the body's immune system would defend, and Mike Wheeler had just waged war against the entire Upside Down. It was all clear to him now; how the vines and the Demogorgon and whatever else lived in this hellhole were all part of the same being; *a living planet*. But it was too late. He slowly backed up towards the door, keeping an eye on the vines on the floor that were hungrily looking for the infection.

The Demogorgon charged out of the classroom a second later and then shot towards Mike. He was literally frozen in place and unable to move. The beast was nearly upon him. But then it jumped up and crashed into the ceiling and went halfway through the concrete. It remained stuck there and moaned painfully while its feet kept dangling in the air. It was, indeed, a spectacular scene.

'What the hell? Is it trying to open a portal?' Mike thought and although he was stuck in a grim situation, couldn't help but laugh at the Demogorgon when it dropped down but before reaching the floor, turned around and crashed into the concrete with another painful moan, and went halfway in again. The pattern somehow reminded Mike of someone but before he could connect the dots, Eleven walked out of the classroom, a strange fury burning in her eyes, the same rage and hatred that he had seen when she saved him from the bullies and then when she blew the brains out of the military who pulled a gun on Mike. This Demogorgon would be dying a painful death alright, but Mike was far more worried about the streaks of blood that were now coming down Eleven's eyes and ears and running down her neck. He needed to end this soon.

When Mike disappeared around the corner, shouting at El to run away, she felt something change inside her, something that had finally found a reason to wake up after a long slumber. It enkindled an extinguished fire inside her heart and spread the warmth through her body; *a reason to live was as good as a reason to fight*. And she would fight, today, tomorrow and as long as it would take to save the one boy who owed her an answer. And then she ran after him as fast as she could. Ahead of her, just beyond her field of vision, she heard Mike cursing loudly and immediately knew that he was in trouble. The monster running after him exited the classroom and then turned left and dashed forward. El had had enough; she focused all her powers into one point and then grabbed the beast, even though it was beyond her line of sight, and then drove it towards the ceiling with enough rage to flip over ten cars. And then she hammered it down into the ground with enough force to blow out the brains of every personnel of Hawkins Lab in a single attempt. A few moments later, she came out of the classroom and breathed a sigh of relief after seeing Mike standing near the door with a stupified look on his face.

Mike thought about running ahead and hugging El as tightly as he could, but the twitching legs of the half-buried Demogorgon sticking out of the ground distracted him. The vines were coiling around them and screeching in a continuous tone and from somewhere far away, Mike heard a strange buzzing noise like a billion bees flying together in complete disharmony. Something big was heading their way; the living planet was sending its champion to take out a stupid boy and his oblivious girlfriend. But El came first.

"El? Are you okay?" Mike ran around the Demogorgon and reached El and then after seeing her standing right in front of him, couldn't help but to hug her. El couldn't speak as she was hit by a barrage of emotions, most of them she couldn't explain, but they all led to one conclusion; she was complete. And so was Mike. They buried their heads in each other's shoulders and felt their heartbeats becoming one, and their souls finding a reason to exist once again. Mike pulled away and shouted, "You're okay. You came back. You..."

He couldn't finish his sentence, nor did he need to. The tears streaming down his cheek, resonating with the ones coming down her blood smeared face conversed to their souls, in more ways than possible by using words alone. El couldn't speak either, she simply

nodded and smiled at the boy who meant the world to her.

"El, we need to get out. The gate closed, you think you can open it?" Mike asked in a concerned tone.

El hesitantly replied, "I don't know..."

Mike thought for a few seconds and looked back at the Demogorgon which was barely moving, and made no attempt to climb out of his impromptu grave on the floor. Then his eyes sparkled as he turned around and spoke, "I think I know how to get out. Listen..."

Sometime later, the Demogorgon slowly started rising out of the hole in the ground, like a screwed up Upside Down angel. Given the pounding handed to it by an enraged Eleven, it was pretty much halfway to the Upside Down afterlife, or whatever was the equivalent. But it was still alive, and that gave Mike the idea that El was executing right now. He wasn't sure if it was going to work, but they had no other options. The vines had grown and spread around them, sealing all possible exits out of the school, and the buzzing noise was almost upon them.

"Ready?" Mike asked while holding El around the waist.

She nodded and then raised her arms, and then the Demogorgon shrieked in terrible agony, just like how its predecessor had roared as it was disintegrated by El that night, but not before it teleported them to the Upside Down. So, Mike figured the reverse logic could apply here. Faced with an existential crisis, the Demogorgon's subconscious survival mechanism would try to open the portal to get his master to safety, and with a bit of help from El, it might indeed take them back to their world. After all, they were out of other options.

The forest of vines started screeching in their sonorous tone as they coiled and writhed around Mike and Eleven. Mike assessed the area and prayed that they would be able to get out before the living forest decided to take out the infection by itself. The buzzing noise suddenly increased by a thousand folds as the ceiling crashed inwards and formed a gigantic hole about a few meters away from where Eleven was trying to break the living Demogorgon apart, and through that hole, Mike saw a dark cloud hovering outside. It had a bulbous head, and long tentacle-like arms made up of an infinite number of fine dust particles, all swirling like a continuous chain of a living

tornado. Red lightning flashed in the sky that was visible behind that creature, and for a brief second, Mike could see a grotesque monstrosity descending upon them; the angry God of Upside Down had finally arrived to punish the heretics. Mike swallowed and turned around to warn Eleven, but he never got the chance.

A bright flash of light came from the Demogorgon that was slowly disintegrating into black fragments, and then the haze of particles started engulfing Mike and Eleven, standing together in the corridor. Outside, the monstrosity roared like the hum of billions of angry bees and threw a tentacle towards them. Mike braced for the impact as he held Eleven tightly. If death was inevitable, then at least he should die while holding the girl who taught him how to fall in love. *And this was how their story would end, rather poetic...* The world disappeared around him.

A lifetime later, Mike regained consciousness for the second time that day but didn't dare to open his eyes. He was not so sure where he was, it certainly smelled like their own world, but he found it difficult to breathe. Maybe he was dying, but the weight on his chest indicated that it wasn't a lack of air; instead, a physical object trying to suffocate him to death. Finally, after some deliberation, he opened his eyes and found Eleven lying right on top of him with her back facing his body. He wanted to shout in joy but couldn't breathe, so he gently turned around and laid her down to the ground. She came back a few seconds later and saw Mike staring right at her, their faces inches apart from each other. There was a brief pause, and then as soon as Mike tried saying something, El thrust her head forward and kissed him on the lips, completely taking him off-guard and blowing the remaining air out of his lungs. And when she pulled away, he grinned like a fool just like how she had smiled back in the gym and was now reciprocated when she started laughing too.

It was the dead of the night when Mike and Eleven finally sneaked into the Wheeler residence through a window on the ground floor. As expected, Mike didn't find anyone up, his parents had gone to sleep, and Nancy was probably with Steve somewhere, studying human anatomy, which had suddenly piqued his interest. He took El to the washroom and cleaned her up nicely, all the while talking about a

thousand things which he knew were not making any sense to her. But she smiled at every one of his words and tried pitching in, often getting stuck with a compound word or two. After changing into fresh clothes belonging to Mike, they finally came down to the basement and then El ran into the tent while dragging Mike along with her. He had already taken out a box of Eggos from the refrigerator which he emptied onto a plate placed between them. Then Mike covered the open end of the canopy and gently spoke, "You wanted to ask me something in the washroom? About the kiss?" His ears went red even though he had blabbered to Eleven about what a kiss was a little while earlier, and he looked away from her in shame.

El took a bite from an Eggo and asked innocently, "Mike. Papa said, if we kiss, then we are married. Are we married?"

A/N: I can't be the only one whose heart was crushed when Eleven went away from Mike on that fateful night. And even before moving onto S2, I imagined all the possible ways they could be reunited again, and one of them I gave life in this story. This narrative borrows a few elements from the second season and a bit of my imagination about the upside down, something I might use in one of my long-fics someday. If you've liked this, please leave a comment below, and if you haven't, then definitely provide the feedback. Other stories are running in my mind right now as I draft my next long fic post ST3, and I will be writing them one by one as time permits. The next one might be a Hopper X Mike heart to heart before 3 inches became a thing ;)